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ABSTRACT

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA) is one of the most comprehensive education reform efforts attempted in the United States. This document presents an overview of factors leading to KERA's passage, its accomplishments, and areas in need of improvement. The conditions leading up to passage of KERA included disparities across Kentucky school districts in educational finance, materials, services, teacher salaries, and educational quality. Poor educational performance occurred systemwide. Recommendations are made to: (1) improve information dissemination about KERA; (2) improve parent involvement; (3) give teachers more direction, though a statewide curriculum is not necessary; (4) use rewards and sanctions to enhance school accountability; (5) include nationally normed tests in the overall assessment; (6) provide more teacher time for professional development; and (7) retain the primary program. (Contains 29 notes.) (LMI)

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from dilemma to opportunity

ED 461 142

A REPORT ON
EDUCATION REFORM IN KENTUCKY

5 YEARS AFTER

THE KENTUCKY EDUCATION
REFORM ACT OF 1990

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Lexington, Kentucky
February 1996

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ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform was initiated in 1991 by the chief executive officers of three national companies with strong ties to Kentucky — United Parcel Service, Ashland Inc., and Humana Inc.

The Partnership is a nonpartisan coalition of leaders from business, government, agriculture, labor and education dedicated to successful implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990.

The Partnership's established goals are:

To promote public understanding and support for the implementation of the provisions and goals of the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

To provide an ongoing, nonpartisan forum for identification and resolution of problems and concerns.

To serve as a vehicle for securing technical assistance and expertise to facilitate the successful implementation of education reform.

Partnership activities include:

THE KERA BUS EXHIBIT
A customized school bus that travels throughout the state carrying information about Kentucky's education program.

EDUCATION ARCHIVE AND RESOURCE CENTER
A library of current and historical information about education and reform.

SPEAKERS BUREAU
Kentuckians who are knowledgeable about education reform and are committed to seeing that accurate information is available.

800 INFORMATION TELEPHONE LINE
A toll-free telephone line available to people with questions about Kentucky's education program.

BUSINESS INITIATIVES
A program designed to involve Kentucky's business community in education.

WELCOMING SCHOOLS
A recognition of schools that are family and community friendly and that create a positive learning environment for students.

PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN
An ongoing effort to inform the public about education through television, radio, and print media.

GRASSROOTS LIAISONS
A program that involves citizens at the grassroots level in a wide variety of reform efforts.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Research and recommendations designed to help Kentucky teachers receive the best possible training.

EDUCATION AMBASSADORS
Governor's Scholars who create projects to educate the public about education reform.

T2 — TEACHERS TO THE POWER OF TWO
A joint effort with the Kentucky Education Association to help teachers learn about reform in their own classrooms from their peers.

PUBLICATIONS
A wide variety of materials about Kentucky's education program designed to help the public understand reform.

The Partnership carries out its mission in close cooperation with the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a volunteer organization of citizens committed to improving Kentucky schools. The Partnership and the Prichard Committee share administrative and fiscal services, conduct joint fund raising, and coordinate activities and programs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
VOLUME I	
FROM DILEMMA TO OPPORTUNITY	
I. "BACK TO THE BASICS"	1
Context: Factors Behind the Court's Decision	3
Not an Experiment, But a Work in Progress	7
II. FROM DILEMMA TO OPPORTUNITY	9
The Dilemma	10
Defining the Opportunity	11
Kentucky's Six Education Goals	12
An Agenda for Systemic Change: Three Broad Areas	13
III. RESULTS AND CHALLENGES	15
Systemic Results and Challenges	17
Results and Challenges in Key Reform Areas	21
Assessment and Accountability	21
Professional Development	24
The Preschool and Primary Program	26
Technology	28
Family Resource and Youth Services Centers	29
Governance	31
Finance	33
IV. RECOMMENDATIONS	35
General Recommendations	36
Specific Recommendations	37
Assessment and Accountability	37
Professional Development	38
Primary Program	38
Technology	38
Family Resource and Youth Services Centers	39
Governance	39
Finance	40
V. CLAIMING THE OPPORTUNITY	41
END NOTES	45

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA) is one of the most far-reaching education reform efforts ever attempted in the United States. It has now been the law of the Commonwealth for five years. Using this five-year track record, we can evaluate KERA's success at providing what the people of Kentucky want for their children: an education that will equip them for productive work, effective citizenship, and a fulfilling life.

This document takes one step back and presents a comprehensive view of what prompted KERA, what it has accomplished, and what still remains to be done. While we do not comment on every aspect or feature of reform, we believe we have focused on those aspects of reform that have brought about significant change.

Because KERA calls for such comprehensive changes, the implementation process has been difficult — sometimes confusing, often frustrating, frequently rewarding. Some features of the legislation, such as the primary program and the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) assessment program, have been scrutinized intensely; indeed, more than a score of academic studies concerning various aspects of KERA have been completed. In many communities, parents and education professionals also have been slow to embrace change and to adopt new ideas about school-based decision making. While resistance and uncertainty were not unexpected, they have been more than matched by KERA's successes in the classroom, in school governance, and especially in achieving KERA's overriding goal: to make public education in Kentucky accountable for its results.

In 1991, The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform pledged a 10-year support for successful school reform implementation. The half-way point in that process

has now been reached. The Partnership's assessment of KERA is a positive one: on the whole, the reform effort has been a success. Much has been achieved, but we must not let today's successes diminish tomorrow's efforts. Nor can we allow ourselves to become impatient, pushing to dismantle reforms before they have had enough time to succeed. At this point, a return to education prior to 1990 is simply not one of the alternatives.

We have an historic opportunity before us, not merely to reform the mechanics of a statewide system for delivering instruction, but ultimately to provide our children with the education they will need to live productively and successfully in a new century of challenge and change. Education is, to be sure, about acquiring the knowledge and skills that such a task requires; it is about preparing young people for the workplace, family life, and careers. But it is also about deeper things. At its core, education is teaching children how to take delight in learning for its own sake. It is helping them become the kinds of adults who can take from their work not just a salary, but satisfaction as well. It is preparing them to take on the responsibilities of citizenship and helping them understand their roles as custodians of a rich and vital culture. In the end, each new generation has a right to expect that its predecessors provide them not only with the tools to achieve those larger goals, but with a sense of the significance of those goals as well.

On behalf of The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, we urge every Kentuckian to join us in our long-term commitment to the vision, promise, and opportunity that education can and must offer to all our children.

John R. Hall
Chairman and CEO
Ashland Inc.

David A. Jones
Chairman and CEO
Humana Inc.

Kent C. "Oz" Nelson
Chairman and CEO
United Parcel Service of America

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I. BACK TO THE BASICS

I. "BACK TO THE BASICS"

Unconstitutional. That is the ultimate judgment a court can pronounce. The court that makes it says, in effect: What is happening here can be countenanced no longer because it violates citizens' rights at the most fundamental level. The law that permits or requires this activity must be struck down and the practices based on it must cease.

"WHEN DOROTHY WENT BACK TO KANSAS, KANSAS WASN'T THE SAME "

"What in the world does 'unconstitutional' have to do with me?" As a primary teacher at Lexington's Lansdowne Elementary, that was Linda Edin's reaction when she first learned of the pronouncement by the Kentucky Supreme Court. "I have a good principal, a good superintendent; I teach in a good school; my county funds its schools."

Edin had already been through "Back to Basics," "Open Classroom," and the "Kentucky Essential Skills Program." So when KERA was unveiled, she, like many teachers, took it with a grain of salt. "They'll never get it off the ground," she thought.

But once it began to sink in that several dimensions of the primary program were going to fundamentally change the way she taught, she realized that "I was like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz. [We teachers] had been moved to a whole other place." When Edin began to participate in the professional development process intended to help teachers implement KERA, her darkest suspicions were confirmed. "Here I was, a veteran teacher, who thought that up until now I really knew what I was doing ... It felt like I was going through my first year of teaching -- every single day."

After a while, it dawned on her and her colleagues that they were all looking desperately for "the Wizard, the one who could tell us how to get back home" to the familiar world they were used to. "But what we finally realized," she says, "was that we already had the answers ... Reform is about how a teacher constructs her own answers ... When Dorothy went back to Kansas, Kansas wasn't the same. If reform stopped tomorrow, I would be a different teacher than I was."

Source: ***"A Teacher's Search for the Wizard of Oz," Video, The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, Lexington, 1994.***

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On June 8, 1989, the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of Kentucky said the General Assembly was not doing what Section 183 of the Kentucky Constitution required: providing for an "efficient system of common schools throughout the state." The existing system, the Court said, lacked "substantial uniformity, substantial equality of financial resources, and equal educational opportunity for all students."[1] The language of Chief Justice Stephens's opinion left no room for ambiguity:

> ***"Lest there be any doubt, the result of our decision is that Kentucky's entire system of common schools is unconstitutional ... This decision applies to the statutes creating, implementing, and financing the system and to all regulations, etc., pertaining thereto. This decision covers the creation of local school districts, school boards, and the Kentucky Department of Education ... It covers school construction and maintenance, teacher certification — the whole gamut of the Kentucky school system."[2]***

The state's entire education apparatus, home for some 556,000 students and employer for some 40,000 teachers, no longer had any legal foundation for its existence. It had to be rebuilt. In a powerful irony, the Court's pronouncement of unconstitutionality meant that in Kentucky, education had to "get back to the basics" in every way imaginable.

In a powerful irony, the pronouncement of unconstitutionality meant that in Kentucky, education had to "get back to the basics" in every way imaginable.

Context: Factors Behind the Court's Decision. The Court's decision arose from a complex argument over education funding. But the issue ran deeper than that. The plaintiffs in the original suit had argued that issues of inequity in funding were only the most egregious problems.[3] The depressingly poor performance of Kentucky's schools on many indicators demonstrated that the schools were harming students vir-

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tually across the board. There were great disparities across school districts in educational services, materials, teachers' salaries, class sizes, curriculum, and quality of management. Differences in annual per-pupil expenditures ran to thousands of dollars annually.

A PARENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE – AND SEES A DIFFERENCE

In 1987, JoAnn Johnson started checking out the schools that her two daughters would soon be entering in Princeton, Kentucky. She was deeply disappointed. The schools there were in worse physical shape than the oldest schools she had attended in Florida 30 years ago. There were fewer educational opportunities, especially in the areas of arts and sciences. Parents, teachers, and students were involved in fund raisers to raise money for basic school supplies and workbooks. The kids were sent door-to-door to sell all kinds of things, and there were contests to see who could sell the most. Johnson explained that she "thought the kids were being exploited" and she kept asking "why?"

KERA-related funding she notes, "has pretty much put a stop" to the fund raising contests. It has also helped her district complete two additional school buildings (one was already underway). "Replacing three of our four schools in six years was a major feat and has put us in an enviable position as far as school facilities are concerned."

Johnson, whose daughters are now 11 and 13, is heavily involved in PTA where she organized a combined "unit" for primary and elementary schools and another for the middle school. She notes that parent involvement overall has moved beyond the basic volunteer tasks (copying, fund raising, etc.) to providing informative parent programs and newsletters, advocating for improved playground conditions, sponsoring reading incentive programs, bringing performing artists to the schools, and finding community support for Baby-Think-It-Over Dolls as teen pregnancy deterrents. Many of these efforts coordinate well with her school's Family Resource and Youth Services Center, which Johnson describes as "another very positive aspect of KERA."

Johnson still has "mixed feelings" about the portfolio program. "It's a great idea, but more effort is needed to make it continuous through the school year. The portfolio writing tends to get crunched into March, just before the KIRIS assessment, then April is spent largely on testing." She attributes part of the problem to the fact that "in the first couple of years, teachers were getting too many mixed messages from the Department [of Education]." But, she admits, "I heard a local teacher discussing portfolios on the radio the other day, and she said, 'At first I bristled about them, but now I'm sold. Students have so much more control over their writing, and they get turned on to it.' I felt good hearing her say that."

Source: Personal Interview, December 1, 1995.

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But beneath these obvious disparities there was something more threatening: pervasive, systemic inadequacy. For nearly a decade, reform groups and the media had been pointing to academic performance and educational results that were not just dismal but shameful (see sidebar). Kentucky had the most poorly educated workforce in the country and, according to a knowledgeable observer, was in danger of becoming "the nation's premier economic backwater."[4]

Even prior to the Court's decision, these indicators, and the entrenched conditions to which they pointed, had given rise to a movement for education reform in Kentucky, partly sustained by the growing national preoccupation with educational performance in the 1980s. In the early years of that decade, for example, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence had coalesced the energies of a wide range of Kentucky citizens, and went to work as an independent advocate for education reform. By 1987, Governor Wallace Wilkinson also was espousing an education reform platform, which began taking shape around a daring assertion: "The school system in Kentucky cannot be redeemed or fixed. It has to be done over."[5]

Kentucky was in danger of becoming "the nation's premier economic backwater."

The General Assembly responded to the court decision by appointing a 23-member Task Force on Education Reform, including legislative leaders and officials from the executive branch, assisted by nationally prominent consultants with expertise in core education reform issues. To comply with the Court's directive, the Task Force was charged with helping the legislature redesign a whole new system of public education by the close of the 1990 General Assembly session.

Educational Attainment	Percent or Funds Expended	National Rank
Adult Literacy (adults with more than an 8th grade education)	69 percent	50th (1980)
Adults age 25 or more with high school diploma	53.1 percent	50th (1980)
College Graduates	11.1 percent	49th (1980)
Per Pupil Expenditure	$2,486/yr	48th (1986)
Per Capita Expenditure by state and local governments on public schools	$499/yr	48th (1988)
Pupil/teacher ratio	18.6 to 1	38th (1987)
Minority enrollment	11 percent	35th (1987)
High school retention rate	69 percent	35th (1987)
Average teacher salary	$24,930/yr	38th (1989)
ACT scores	18.3	20th of 28 states (1987)
Revenue received from federal government* *(*Seen as a lack of Kentucky's ability to meet its own education needs without federal assistance.)*	13.3% of all money spent on education	1st (1986)

Other Indicators

Percentage of Kentucky residents living in poverty in 1990: 19%

Percentage of Kentucky children living in poverty in 1990: 25%

Source: The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

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The work of redesigning and restructuring occupied the Task Force for nine months. The Kentucky Education Reform Act was signed into law in April 1990 and took effect on July 13, 1990; the journey from an unconstitutional system to a wholly new approach to educating Kentucky's children took just one year. A $1.2 billion, biennial tax increase was enacted, most of which was used to pay for education. KERA was a remarkable achievement by any standard. But difficult as it was, constructing a new education system on paper was the easy part; the reforms were now to be implemented at ground level.

Not an Experiment, But a Work in Progress. The Kentucky Education Reform Act now has a five-year track record. Before looking at what it has accomplished, however, it is important to deal with a pervasive misconception. Many have come to believe, perhaps because of the controversial nature of what has been attempted, that KERA is some kind of "experiment." Nothing could be further from the truth. Whether in science or in society, experimentation is a kind of luxury, a change strategy that is available when there is a secure fallback position in case of failure — a scientific experiment, for example, assumes a working set of scientific laws; a social experiment assumes a stable institutional base. But in Kentucky, the security and stability of the state's educational framework were both gone — finished. In every sense, reform was not an experiment at all; it was an utter necessity.[6]

In every sense, the reform was not an experiment at all but an utter necessity.

Five years later, the new law — and all it entails — is one of the most ambitious programs of its kind ever attempted. But many of the changes produced by KERA have been more dramatic than deep. Now that the initial excitement has subsided, the arduous process of real change is underway. The task is becoming more well-defined. Section II explores more fully the dimensions of the reform effort and its rationale.

II. FROM DILEMMA TO OPPORTUNITY

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Public education in Kentucky is fundamentally about children and what happens to them. That single, bracing message permeated the opinion of the Court and the message it conveyed to the General Assembly. In the end, the reasoning went, school funding formulas create schools where children go each morning to learn. Tax dollars pay the salaries of teachers who are paid to teach children. School administrators have responsibility for the management of schools and districts that either meet or fail to meet the needs of children. The Court's concern for children was unmistakable:

> ***"Kentucky's children," the Court said, "simply because of their place of residence, are offered a virtual hodgepodge of educational opportunities ... Can anyone seriously argue that these disparities do not affect the basic educational opportunities of those children in the poorer districts? To ask the question is to answer it. Children in 80 percent of local school districts in this Commonwealth are not as well-educated as those in the other 20 percent ... [the system] is discriminatory as to the children served ... A child's right to an adequate education is a fundamental one under our Constitution."[7]***

It is to that concern for children and what happens to them that the education reform movement in Kentucky has sought to be responsive and responsible.

The Dilemma. The Court's decision had forced Kentucky to face a dilemma: Kentucky's system of education was inadequate and unconstitutional. The old way was no longer possible, but there was no clear "new" way to go. Moreover, attempting to gradually change the system was not an option. The reform architects displayed remarkable leadership when they redefined this dilemma as an opportunity. They began everything afresh and at once.

The reform effort structured an entirely new system for delivering education to Kentucky school children in grades K-12, responsive to the Court's directives in the crucial areas of curriculum, governance, and finance. Not only was this an entirely new system, but it incorporated some of the most advanced education thinking and experience from around the country in a wide variety of areas including school accountability, assessment, primary education, educational technology, school-based decision making, and educational finance.

The willingness to face the dilemma and to take such risks for the good of Kentucky's children will be remembered as one of the Commonwealth's finest moments.

Defining the Opportunity. The new law made two dramatic and controversial assumptions from the outset: (1) all children could learn at higher levels and (2) local schools had to be the fundamental unit of change.

"All children can learn at dramatically high levels that can keep us in competition with nations around the world."

Thomas C. Boysen
Kentucky Commissioner
of Education, 1991

The logical consequences of those two assumptions were also twofold: (1) that the General Assembly had to provide the schools with the resources they needed to succeed, and (2) that schools should be held accountable for the results they produced. Perhaps most difficult of all, success would be determined by how — and how well — teachers and principals did their jobs, while they were finding their way in a newly restructuring system. Both perspective and practice would have to change not only simultaneously, but on the wing.

Kentucky's Six Education Goals. KERA touches on every important process and event in Kentucky's schools: from teaching young children how to read to training principals how to make the reform process work, from setting subject-area content and performance standards to installing school-based decision making at the local level. Significantly, all six of Kentucky's education goals are imbued with the conviction that "real life," in the form of responsible citizenship, community participation, lifelong learning, and productive work, should help set the terms for what happens in every Kentucky child's schooling (see box).

KENTUCKY'S SIX EDUCATION GOALS

A. Schools shall expect a high level of achievement of all students.

B. Schools shall develop their students' ability to:

- **use basic communication and mathematics skills for the purposes and situations they will encounter throughout their lives;**
- **apply core concepts and principles from mathematics, the sciences, the arts, the humanities, social studies, and practical living studies to situations they will encounter throughout their lives;**
- **become self-sufficient individuals;**
- **become responsible members of a family, work group, or community, including demonstrating effectiveness in community service;**
- **think and solve problems in school situations and in a variety of situations they will encounter in life; and**
- **connect and integrate experiences and new knowledge from all subject matter fields with what they have previously learned and build on past learning experiences to acquire new information through various media sources.**

Source: Legislative declaration on goals for Commonwealth's schools; model curriculum framework.

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An Agenda for Systemic Change: Three Broad Areas. Kentucky's six education goals provide the focus for the entire system of education. From the point of view of the law, three major components of Kentucky's education system had to be reconstructed to ensure the transformation of the system as a whole.

First, the heart of the new system is the *curriculum.* New thinking about how schools are best organized to teach children, and the services needed to support effective learning, have redefined what happens in classrooms. Under the Kentucky Education Reform Act:

- ***accountability for results is now the primary driver of the entire system***
- ***new forms of assessment, in turn, are the operational component of accountability***
- ***professional development programs and new attention to teacher preparation are underway to help teachers acquire and sharpen the skills they need to work effectively in the new system. Regional Service Centers have been established to provide professional development services to educators***
- ***a preschool program and a primary program (K-3) have been established to provide young students with a solid foundation for success in school***
- ***a new plan for educational technology has increased the number of effective instructional resources, and***
- ***similarly, Family Resource and Youth Services Centers and Extended School Services are providing academic help to students and support to families to improve learning conditions.***

The second broad reform area is *governance.* The power of what happens in schools requires the power of government — the people — to support and guarantee it. Beginning with the General Assembly, the way the Kentucky school system is administered has been changed from top to bottom, not only by depoliticizing and decentralizing it, but by introducing a powerful new tool for change-making at the school level: school-based decision making.

Third is *finance:* Education spending under the new system has been changed to reflect Kentucky's reform priorities. In practical terms, that means funding has both been increased and made equitable.

Section III, "Results and Challenges," offers a thumbnail description of the key accomplishments achieved thus far under KERA, and points out some of the difficulties that still lie ahead. More detailed information and supporting discussion is provided in Sections A-C of Volume II of this report (pp. 15-34).

III. RESULTS AND CHALLENGES

III. RESULTS AND CHALLENGES

The intent of this section is to provide an overview of what has been achieved by the education reform effort thus far, but with particular attention to specific key areas. In the main, a broad assessment of the reform effort shows that it is well on the way to accomplishing what it set out to do: Kentucky is working effectively to achieve the goals of reform and the results hoped for are being realized.

That does not mean that outstanding or uniform progress is being made in all areas. In some, such as gains in academic achievement, results are basically aligned with expectations. In others, such as the assessment of student performance, spirited debate continues about the reliability of statewide testing results; agreement is not universal about how well Kentucky's children are performing. In still other areas, such as the development of school-based decision making councils and implementation of a statewide technology system, progress has been notable, but slower than hoped for.

In this section of the report, the results achieved thus far are presented in two basic groups: (1) systemic results and (2) results for key reform areas. Where challenges remain or more attention seems needed to solidify gains, this is noted briefly in the discussion; readers interested in more detailed discussions of each of these key reform areas are referred in the text to the appropriate pages of Volume II. The Partnership's specific recommendations for the areas of reform activity it believes need addressing are presented in Section IV.

Systemic Results and Challenges. The most significant result of education reform in Kentucky is the one least noticed. Beyond the debate about specific reforms, the fact remains that in 1990 Kentucky took one of the biggest risks ever taken in American education. In little more than a year, the state went from having its entire education system declared unconstitutional to launching what has been described as the most comprehensive education reform package ever attempted in the United States. Five years later, the reform effort is not only solidly in place, it is, for the most part, delivering what it promised. Nine characteristics of this overall, systemic achievement stand out.

- ***Educational results, as demonstrated by improved academic performance by students at all levels, are now the core criterion for successful education reform in Kentucky. This is a change from the pre-reform perspective, which tended to judge the quality of Kentucky's education system in terms of the resources put into it; now, what matters is what the education system is producing — what comes out of it.***

- ***This focus on results has produced them. Student achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, as measured by the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), has increased by 19 percent between 1992 and 1994, and 95 percent of all schools raised the level of student academic performance; 38 percent of all schools and 24 percent of all districts improved enough to earn rewards.[8] The percentage of students performing at the two highest levels of achievement in the KIRIS evaluations ("Proficient" and "Distinguished") nearly doubled, while the proportion performing at the lowest ("Novice") level declined from almost half (48 percent) to just over a third (34.8 percent).[9]***

- ***There has been a turnaround in momentum. The new conversation about how children should be educated now focuses not just on problems but on solutions. Despite some fits and starts, there is a distinct sense of forward motion. In the words of one teacher, "Now we talk more about how children learn than about how many crayons to buy."***

- ***Public education in Kentucky is now driven fundamentally by a strong accountability and assessment system — one that is firmly grounded in testing, performance assessment, standards, and rewards and sanctions. In other words, learning results can be and are being measured.***

- ***As a result, the reform effort has earned public confidence and support. A strong majority of school professionals and par-***

ents believe that schools have changed for the better since KERA, and that the majority of KERA initiatives are working.[10]

- *Attention to how the state's schools are run has a different focus; school governance is now a two-way street. A new, decentralized system is in place, one that relies on and incorporates initiatives, partnerships, and communication between school administrators (from the top down) and those active at the "point of instruction," i.e., teachers, parents, and community members (from the bottom up).*

- *A commitment to supporting professional development and technical assistance has assumed major importance in the reform effort, both in terms of the absolutely crucial role each must play in making reform work and in terms of funding support.*

- *Schools are responding to the urgency and the incentives of reform. Thirty-eight percent of all schools have raised their performance enough to receive $26 million in monetary rewards from the state.[11]*

- *The basic principles and goals underlying reform have redefined the "organizational culture" of schools all over Kentucky:*

  The principle that teachers and schools should be fully accountable and responsible for the quality and results of educational practice has been endorsed by teachers, school professionals, and the public alike (see note 10).

  The concept that change must be systemic and not piecemeal has been accepted. The state-level education bureaucracy has been dramatically reduced and reorganized to support reform.

  Most of the education community has accepted change as not only necessary but desirable.

  Giant strides have been made in the direction of making educational opportunity and education funding more equitable, even in the face of having to pay higher taxes.

These successes, already achieved, provide confidence that the problems yet to be solved are neither intrinsic nor insuperable. At the same time, however, several broad-ranged challenges remain. Despite much publicity about KERA over the past five years, there is still a widespread lack of knowledge about it. More than half of the general public and more than 40 percent of parents say they still know little or nothing about KERA, according to three 1994 surveys (see note 10).

I WAS NOT ONE WHO THOUGHT THE SYSTEM WAS BROKEN

When the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 was passed, Principal Patrick Courtney of the Hanson Elementary School in Hopkins County made no secret of the fact that "you were looking at an angry, upset principal who felt like he had been left out of the decision making ... I was not one who thought the system was broken."

But as he became more involved with legislative and business leaders, learning more about the conditions underlying the reform initiative, he began to pay more attention. "I found out items of information such as the drop-out rate in Kentucky was 30 percent," he says, "and that there was a drastic need for reform."

Gradually, as the elements of the reform program unfolded, e.g., the primary program and school-based decision making, Courtney found himself coming around more and more to a new perspective. "Now, I am at the opposite end of the spectrum. I am a firm believer."

He is particularly encouraged that "the basics have not been left out. What has changed is the approach in getting them across. [Students] still learn their math facts, but they also learn the reasoning behind those facts."

Source: "Time for a Change: Educational Reform in Kentucky," Video, Kentucky Educational Television, 1994.

There remains a lingering sense in some quarters that the reform agenda was "too ambitious" and should have been carried out "more gradually." This sentiment, however, misses a fundamental point: the entire system was declared unconstitutional, a fact that rendered gradualism a non-option. Nevertheless, in some schools and districts, acceptance of the reform effort remains mixed, and there is still confusion about how specific elements of the reform program are supposed to work together to produce change.

There are, as well, those who either remain skeptical about the reform philosophy or are uncommitted to reform and their own participation in it. On recent surveys, for example, only about half of principals and a third of teachers registered agreement with such basic KERA beliefs as: (1) all children can learn at a relatively high level; (2) we should set high stan-

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dards for all children; and (3) demonstrating mere knowledge of facts is not enough; children should be able to demonstrate that they can apply what they know (see note 10).

Many teachers and schools have yet to take full responsibility for their roles in reform.

Success in education restructuring remains uneven, and there is lingering reluctance on the part of some to adopt the spirit of reform. Not all teachers have been trained in crucial features of the reform program, e. g., new modes of assessment. On the part of some teachers and schools, there has been a lack of initiative in taking advantage of the resources available to help them put reforms in place locally. In short, many teachers and schools have yet to take full responsibility for their roles in reform. At the same time, full confidence in KIRIS is still lacking statewide. Less than half of school professionals, parents, and the general public believe it is working well. More than a fourth of the unsolicited comments on recent surveys related to the need for improving KIRIS (see note 10).

After five years, and despite a monumental effort, one of the significant holes in the reform fabric remains the low level of parental involvement. Parents, especially, need more information, encouragement, and assistance in playing their full role in education, in particular as they participate on school-based decision making councils. In addition, many members of the community (e.g., civic groups, businesses, and other groups with a stake in education) have not yet fully embraced their roles in helping schools improve.

There is, finally, a need to make changes in secondary education. Given the appropriate focus on the early years thus far, this is not especially surprising. But

it is imperative that work on the secondary level continue to aggressively address questions of what improvements are required so that the momentum gained does not dissipate.

Results and Challenges in Key Reform Areas. As a result of broad and sweeping changes in the system as a whole, specific changes in several key reform areas are contributing to success. Each is accompanied by its own challenges. Page references following each heading refer to further discussion in Volume II.

Assessment and Accountability (See Volume II, pp. 3-11.)

At the heart of KERA is the vision that all Kentucky students can experience success in learning.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act places a strong emphasis on accountability — an accountability system that sets six goals for schools, establishes learner expectations, monitors the achievement of these expectations, determines whether schools receive rewards, need additional assistance or are sanctioned, and reports to the public.

Testing in the spring of 1992 determined each school's performance level on an accountability index. The State Board of Education established a goal or "threshold" level that each school was expected to meet in 1994. That threshold was higher than the baseline. In other words, schools are expected to do better each testing cycle.

The Kentucky Instructional Results Information System is the assessment program that monitors this progress and reflects the new and higher standards in Kentucky education.

In the past, annual "achievement tests" measured what students knew with multiple choice questions. Kentucky's new performance-based assessment measures what students know and what they can do with what they know through essay questions, portfolios, multiple choice tests, and performance events. Students are tested in grades 4, 5, 8, 11, and 12. Student performance is reported as one of four levels: novice, apprentice, proficient, or distinguished.

This new assessment program requires teachers to make significant changes in the ways they teach; it asks Kentucky students to meet new standards and use information in new ways. Teachers have responded by changing their instructional practices, most notably in writing and mathematics. Instruction is now more closely and clearly tied to assessment and more deliberately tied to real-life situations. Students are encouraged to get the message that what they learn in school has pay-offs in the real world.

Kentucky has made extensive use of its assessment system to provide incentives — monetary rewards to schools whose students meet improvement targets with $26 million awarded to 485 schools and 42 districts in April of 1995.[12] It should be noted that sanctions on those schools and districts that did not meet their targets were delayed by the legislature.

Statewide Average Score on KIRIS	
1991-92	35.6
1992-93	42.9
1993-94	44.8

Several mechanisms are now in place to help schools improve their overall performance and meet their goals. Through the Commonwealth School Improvement Fund, the Kentucky Distinguished Educators Program, and the School Transformation, Assistance and Renewal (STAR) project, the Kentucky Department of Education offers schools voluntary technical assistance to help improve student performance as well as aid other aspects of reform at the local level.

Assessment and accountability reform efforts have fallen short in some areas and will require significant attention in the future. Not all teachers, for example, are trained to meet the requirements that the new assessment system places on instruction. Although training these teachers is partly a function of time, it is equally a matter of a strong teacher "buy-in" and confidence in the reform effort.

Questions have been raised by two panels of testing experts about technical aspects of the KIRIS assessment. These questions must be addressed if educators, parents, and the general public are to have confidence that this test is measuring for the desired results and fairly identifying which schools receive rewards and which schools are to be sanctioned.

Whatever methods are used, assessment has consequences for educators, schools, and school districts. And these consequences make the stakes of assessment higher than they might otherwise be. Under these circumstances, policymakers must continually review assessment practices to assure that such practices are valid, appropriate, and relevant.[13]

Several important results are worth singling out here. First, a new conceptual framework for professional development for teachers has been developed. This framework is driven by a developmental perspective on teacher learning. Second, professional development plans for all districts — a Kentucky first — as well as training for all principals in the reform philosophy and its structures have been completed. As of July 1994, 176 districts and 1,400 schools had produced and implemented professional development programs meeting state standards.[14]

A DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR WORKS ON REFORM

Judy Johnson is a Kentucky Distinguished Educator working with two secondary schools in central Kentucky. That designation means she is one of 46 education professionals who, after receiving special training, are working with schools having problems meeting their KIRIS goals. Distinguished Educators provide assistance to schools as staff develop, implement, and monitor school transformation plans; improve curriculum and instructional practices; and promote community engagement.

Johnson says secondary schools have traditionally found change difficult. Research has found that the very culture of high schools leads to professional isolation. Rarely do secondary level teachers have the opportunity to integrate, to connect, to share ideas and enthusiasm. "There has been less support and encouragement in high schools to make changes."

In secondary schools she finds that "the principal's role has often been that of an authority figure, maintaining order and discipline, rather than that of an instructional leader." Curriculum and implementation of instruction have been the domain of subject area departments.

Asked to name the most potent weapon in the reform arsenal, Johnson replies without hesitation: "Professional development." To understand the need for change, educators must have the time to grow professionally, to study and implement current best practices, and to incorporate new findings about the process of teaching and learning. "Teachers need time to work on their work." Change is best initiated and sustained where professional development is an integral part of the school's plan, a support system for instructional improvement. As an example, Johnson cites the "critical friends group" model implemented this year in both schools where she works. This is a way for teachers to meet in small groups to share professional readings and practices, to observe each other in the classroom and to provide constructive feedback. "It appears to be an effective way to encourage growth and collegiality."

Source: Personal Interview, November 29, 1995

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Third, as part of the process for creating a system of professional development throughout the state, more than 600 professional development consultants had been trained through the Regional Service Center Associates program as of 1994.[15] This commitment of personnel has been matched by a commitment of funds. Indeed, overall spending on professional development has increased dramatically, from $1.1 million in the first year of reform (1990-91) to $11.6 million in 1994-95. Funding for professional development is now $23 per student, compared to $1 per student when reform first got underway.[16]

Fourth, the professional development effort is now tied to local perceptions and articulation of school-based needs, not to a state-level approximation of what local needs are, or should be. Individual schools control 65 percent of professional development funds; school districts control 35 percent. This split strongly enhances the dynamics of school-based decision making.

Finally, the success of local efforts for professional development is reflected in how it has been received. Participants in the Regional Service Center Associates program, for example, gave its capacity-building competencies a 96 percent approval rating.[17]

But a number of tasks remain undone or only partially completed in this area of professional development, arguably the one on which reform success rests more than any other (see Section IV, "Recommendations," p. 35). To make reform work, for example, a tighter connection is needed between the overall reform philosophy and a clear understanding of reform needs on the one hand, and an infrastructure that firmly supports professional development on the other. Reports from around the state indicate that not all teachers are taking advantage of the professional development opportunities available. As one higher education specialist points out, "the challenge is to develop a systematic approach to professional

development that effectively and flexibly enhances the skills of teachers who vary widely in their levels of expertise."[18]

Among local school boards and the state-level policy makers, more overt support is needed for professional development, especially in the task of convincing the public of its value. At the same time, a number of new conditions must be developed so that teachers can fundamentally and permanently change the ways in which they work and learn. For example, teachers need:

- ***opportunities to work with colleagues***
- ***the support and advice of knowledgeable principals***
- ***instructional leaders to observe them trying new teaching practices***
- ***to be part of a larger learning community that provides support and new knowledge***
- ***chances to experience learning in ways consistent with reform***
- ***chances to observe teaching practices that help all students achieve success in school***
- ***to develop new understandings of the subjects they teach***
- ***to feel that they can safely and critically assess their own practice***
- ***the time and mental space it takes to change their roles and teaching practices***

These conditions emphasize the notion that professional development must be redefined as a central part of teaching, and that the support for professional development must be sustained and long term.[19]

The Preschool and Primary Program (See Volume II, pp. 17-22.)

The attention of the reform movement to preschool and early primary education (K-3) is grounded in overwhelming evidence that: (1) children from low-income

families start school behind their peers educationally, behaviorally, and physically; and that (2) the earlier children are able to take advantage of structured learning environments, the more successful learners they become.

The Preschool Program. The Preschool Program has been successful in addressing the problem of reaching preschool, at-risk children and providing them with a developmentally appropriate education to help close the gap with their peers. According to a 1994 study of the results of the KERA Preschool Program by the Kentucky Institute for Education Research, "the program is reaching its goal of reducing the achievement gap between at-risk youngsters and the rest of their classmates," and "preschool participants made statistically significant gains ... in many developmental skills necessary for school success."[20] About 28,000 children are enrolled in Kentucky preschools and Head Start programs, some 77 percent of those eligible. This is a significant increase over the 28 percent of eligible children served in preschool and Head Start programs during 1989-90.[21]

The Primary Program. Kentucky's primary program is one of the more controversial of the reform effort. It has attracted favorable national attention, especially in its combination of ungraded classrooms and continuous progress. The principles of multi-age grouping and permitting children to learn at their own pace have recognized that students differ in educational levels and have eliminated the need to retain young children. Before reform, 22 percent of children entering kindergarten were being retained by Grade 3.[22] Student achievement and teachers' strengths in teaching basic skills appear to be gradually increasing, and positive results have been shown in primary program classrooms where a high level of implementation is taking place.

"We can write in our journals, stand up in class and read our stories, and even act them out ... Sometimes I write a half a page, sometimes a whole page, sometimes three or four pages, and sometimes 20."

- Kim Richey, Age 7

There are needed improvements in the primary program (see Section IV, "Recommendations," p. 35). For example, too many elementary level teachers still lack the skills necessary to create the kind of learning environment called for. Teachers also need guidance in helping their students to learn effectively in a new era geared to standards and performance. And, there is still too much variability in the implementation of the primary program from school to school and classroom to classroom.

Technology (See Volume II, pp. 23-24.)

In an age when the impact of technology on every aspect of American life is pervasive, the schools have been, unhappily, among the least productive adopters and users of technology for learning. It is heartening, therefore, to learn that education reform has made advances in using and applying technology in the classrooms.

Chief among them is a master plan for developing and using technology; it is widely regarded as one of the nation's best, while the Kentucky Education Technology System is emerging as the premier initiative of its kind in the country.

Among the notable achievements in the use of technology are:

- ***Classroom work stations have increased from one for every 48 students to one for every 17 students in three years; the number of classroom school technology coordinators has increased from 120 to 1,368;[23]***
- ***All 176 school districts have approved technology plans;[24] and***
- ***85 percent of all funds spent on technology go to benefit instruction.[25]***

Despite this noteworthy progress, however, the Kentucky Education Technology System in 1995 remained unconnected to 20 percent of the state's schools.

Among the significant factors retarding a more rapid adoption of technology is simply that not enough teachers are well-trained in using its many forms (computers, CD-ROM, telecommunications, the Internet, etc.). In some cases equipment remains idle or underused and advanced educational software remains on the computer disk, ready for teachers to help students make use of it.

The Kentucky Education Technology System is emerging as the premier education technology initiative of its kind in the country.

On the financial side, in 1995, 75 percent of the state's schools had yet to install a fiscal management system for the Kentucky Education Technology System. More disquieting is the fact that funding for the Kentucky Education Technology System, although higher than in many states, has been insufficient to fully fund the plan. The total cost exceeded the $200 million initial estimate by more than $200 million and the General Assembly has not been able to make up the difference. Funding levels were $40 million a year for school districts in combined state and local dollars for 1992-93 and 1993-94, but dropped to $27.4 million for 1994-95 and 1995-96. More funding is required to reach unmet needs if implementation plans are to remain on track. (See also Section IV, "Recommendations," p. 35)

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (See Volume II, pp. 25-26.)

From the outset, there was consensus that successful reform would require a system that included both family- and community-based resources to support reform and to coordinate services. This conviction was the impetus for the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers.

This idea has, on the whole, found acceptance in Kentucky; Family Resource and Youth Services Centers are widely used. Family Resource

Each center is required to provide the following services

Family Resource Centers	Youth Services Centers
assistance with full-time child care for children 2-3	health services or referral to health services
assistance with after-school child care for children 4-12	referral to social services
health education services for new/expectant parents	employment counseling
support & training for child day-care providers	training & placement for youth
health services or referral to health services	summer & part-time job development for youth
education to enhance parenting skills	substance abuse services or referral
	family crisis & mental health counseling or referral

Centers have been brought on line in stages

FISCAL YEAR	1992	1993	1994	1995
# OF CENTERS	133	223	382	455
# OF SCHOOLS SERVED	240	400	651	752

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Centers serve elementary children and their families, while Youth Services Centers serve middle and secondary youth and their families. Centers are located in or near schools where 20 percent of the students are eligible for free lunch.

Impressive gains have been made in service delivery on several significant indices, e.g., number of students and schools served, number of centers, and funds expended. Funding has more than tripled in four years. However, funding for all other eligible schools and for maintaining the existing program is a continuing concern.

Two other difficulties are getting and keeping parents involved in center activities and enhancing the collaboration with community service providers. [26]

Governance (See Volume II, pp. 27-33.)

Among the significant achievements of the reform effort is the goal of decentralizing of the state's school system, shifting more power and decision making to the local level, and establishing a structure that forces decisions to be made in the best interest of students rather than political expediency.

The elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, a position frequently used as a political jumping off point, was replaced by a professional educator, an appointed Commissioner of Education, accountable to the Kentucky Board of Education. By July 1, 1991, the department was reorganized, and by August 1992 it was decentralized with the creation of eight Regional Service Centers.

The State Board of Education has exhibited a willingness to use its authority to create change, and to intervene in local districts and remove local officials where necessary. Statewide, both in terms of monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of school reform and investigating poor practice, the Office of Education Accountability is functioning well as a watch-dog agency.

At the school level, at least one school-based decision making (SBDM) council has been established in each of Kentucky's school districts (except in some exempted one-school districts). A total of 876 schools had working councils in 1995, more than in any other state in the nation.

At the same time, however, the success of school-based decision making remains somewhat uneven, the pace of adoption of councils is behind expectations, and low parent participaion is disappointing.

Conceptually, a residue of vagueness hangs over the role school councils are supposed to play in achieving reform goals at the local level. It remains unclear in many communities and neighborhoods just what a council is, how it is supposed to function, or how much power it really has.

Even among those councils that have been active, few have learned how to use the power they have in ways that are most effective for enhancing the quality of what goes in classrooms. Many parent members still defer to teachers (who are half of the councils' members) and principals in the decision making process, especially when it comes to instructional and curricular issues.

Finance (See Volume II, pp. 34-36.)

The "presenting issue" that launched school reform was one of school financing; it is therefore gratifying to note that a large measure of funding equalization has been achieved in Kentucky. The gap between property-wealthy and property-poor districts, for example, has been reduced by 50 percent since 1990.

Total state funding for education has increased approximately 42 percent from 1989-94. During that same period, local support for education increased by 40.7 percent. This was a result of the General Assembly's vote in 1990 that all real property be assessed at 100 percent of its fair cash value and all districts levy no less than 25 cents per hundred dollars in assessed property value as well as the incentives that were built into the funding formula to increase local support.[27] Teachers' salaries, too, have increased — by nearly 28 percent statewide. The funds expended for teaching materials and supplies have also increased substantially.[28]

Spending patterns have remained basically unchanged in terms of the proportions of funds devoted to the categories of instruction, administration, transportation, plant operation, maintenance, and fixed charges.[29] There seems to be no consistent pattern of allocation for the new funds brought by funding equalization. In particular, the money seems to be applied inconsistently to reform goals.

Teachers' salaries have increased by more than 28 percent statewide.

In the final analysis, a number of unanswered questions remain about finance, e.g.:

(1) What is the general cost of educating students in different grades and districts? Are the base figures "adequate"?

(2) Where, precisely, are the additional funds being spent?

(3) Which spending categories should be increased to achieve the biggest impact on reform?

(4) Are there any checks or boundaries left over from the pre-reform era that will prevent inequities from reappearing?

(5) What trade-offs for educational effectiveness exist in per pupil versus programmatic funding? and

(6) What are the differential effects of rewards and punishments in achieving desired performances by districts?

Given this overview of results and remaining challenges, The Partnership offers a series of recommendations in Section IV. A caveat is in order here, however. Not every observed problem we have recognized has called forth a recommendation. We believe KERA is fundamentally on the right track. Rather than speak to all issues, we offer suggestions in those areas where we believe there is either some urgency or where we believe the most significant change can occur to bring about reform.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

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The halfway point on any journey is a good place to take stock and to get one's bearings; the principle holds true for the education of Kentucky's children. But after stock-taking and compass-reading come the course corrections offered here in the form of some recommendations. The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform proposes nothing radical in what follows — only some suggestions about how to complete the task already begun.

General Recommendations: The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform continues to believe that the six goals are worth pursuing and the fundamental changes in curriculum, governance, and finance are good. **We therefore recommend that those involved in education reform continue to press forward on the course outlined by the General Assembly in the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990.** The act's integrated structure and direction remain as sound as they are visionary; for the sake of Kentucky's children and their future, reform must not be abandoned.

To address broad systemic issues, we recommend the following:

We recommend that awareness and information dissemination efforts regarding the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 be continued and intensified, encouraging discussion and debate of educational matters.

Too many Kentuckians remain uninformed about the reform effort and are unaware of ways they can participate. The State Department of Education, members of The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, and all others with a stake in reform issues are implicated in this recommendation. Specific targets should include legislators, local boards of education and other education decision makers, and especially the general public. The Partnership pledges its continued support in providing forums, venues, and materials for continuing the discussion and debate over the future of education reform.

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Parental involvement remains one of the most significant, but underused, levers on the successful completion of reform.* We call on the education reform community in Kentucky to adopt greater parental participation at all levels of reform *as a major focus for the next five years.

Specific Recommendations. To address specific areas of reform, we make the following recommendations.

Recommendations for Assessment and Accountability

The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform recommends a continuing commitment to assessment and accountability as the mainstays of reform.

Attention to these elements of reform should be expanded and intensified.

We support and recommend the continued use of rewards and sanctions to encourage continued excellence.

We also believe it is imperative that sanctions be administered promptly to those schools, districts, and educators whose performance fails to meet specific standards.

We recommend that both specific incentives for students and increased opportunities for parental involvement be used to enhance accountability.

We recognize that new standards, core academic concepts, and new methods of testing and assessment can be confusing. As supporters of local decision making, we do not believe it would be appropriate to call for a state curriculum. We do believe, however, that teachers need more direction, and that Kentucky's expectations for core academic content should be communicated early to both teachers and parents.

We therefore encourage a continuing review of core academic content that sets high standards for all students. This core should be communicated clearly to teachers, students, and parents to provide direction for the schools' performance.

We recommend that the assessment system include testing items that will enable parents to compare their children's performance to that of other students, *e.g., by using nationally normed tests as one part of the overall assessment system.*

Recommendation for Professional Development

Strong programs of professional development remain the most critical factor in achieving quality education for all of Kentucky's children. A complicating factor in securing high-quality professional development is the inadequate time made available for teacher work and planning. The Partnership proposes to continue its active support for this vital aspect of education reform and we invite others to join us in this commitment.

Recommendations for the Primary Program

We recommend retention of the primary program *as adopted by the 1990 General Assembly and modified by the General Assemblies of 1992 and 1994.*

We are concerned about meeting the challenges of the primary program that have emerged: misunderstandings about the program's objectives, questions about its methodology, and the degree to which it addresses academic subjects. We believe that a renewed effort should be made to clear up these and other misunderstandings.

We recommend that the primary program not be abandoned unless additional research is conducted which shows that students are achieving less in classrooms of teachers who are aggressively implementing the primary program.

Moreover, we recommend that the primary program not be abandoned unless a clear model of what is to take the place of the primary program is offered.

We recommend that greater attention be given to ensure that schools understand the flexibility they have in areas such as reporting grades, teaching core academic subjects, and communicating with parents about a child's progress. *Local school districts and individual schools, through school councils, can help parents compare their child's performance to other children of the same developmental level. This could include the use of the traditional grades (A, B, C) to describe a child's level of performance as one part of a comprehensive system of qualitative reporting.*

Recommendations for Technology

The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform reaffirms its belief in the vital importance of state-of-the-art technology as a component of school reform.

We recommend that those districts with successful learning technology programs be encouraged to share their experiences with other districts throughout the state. *The Partnership is committed to offering technical assistance and expertise from the private sector to advance the technology program and to assist in bringing this aspect of education reform up to scale statewide.*

We submit the following items of concern, suggesting that the challenges in these areas require more thought, discussion, and action.

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers. The liaison role of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers is a vital one. If these centers are to be used more widely and effectively for all eligible schools, a specific effort is needed to make them and their work known to the leaders of local communities, with a view to strengthening their relationship with the reform effort.

The centers also have a special role to play in regard to parental involvement, and can serve well to advance the cause of reform among parents and other members of the community. We note that the Interagency Task Force continues to be effective in dealing with issues of cooperation and collaboration at the state level. The "sunset" provision for the Task Force in 1997 raises the question of continued governance and leadership for the centers beginning in 1998.

Governance. To address the unevenness in the implementation of school-based decision making and the low level of parental participation in local councils, these vital local institutions require more support. The effort might well make use of traveling teams from successful school-based decision making schools to provide workshops and technical assistance to councils-in-formation, and to serve as roving ambassadors for the school council concept.

As time passes, school councils will likely make more extensive use of their authority and leadership role in such matters as hiring school principals, curriculum, the acquisition and use of instructional resources, scheduling and the use of time. This process of empowerment is valuable and deserves support.

Finance. At this point in the reform process, The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform has no recommendations to make on finance issues, other than to urge reform as a continuing priority in state funding, and to express the hope that the Commonwealth will sustain its strong commitment to completing the tasks that lie ahead.

V. CLAIMING THE OPPORTUNITY

V. CLAIMING THE OPPORTUNITY

After five years of what the Kentucky General Assembly envisioned as a long-term effort, it is time to reflect. By any reasonable evaluation, Kentucky is moving aggressively to its destination. Much has been accomplished; what is left for us now is to persevere in the effort we are making and to think clearly about how we can achieve the goals we have set.

Perseverance. Plutarch had it right when he said "many things which cannot be overcome when they are together yield themselves up when they are taken little by little." That ancient wisdom rings true in 1996. Education reform in Kentucky is an exercise in a-step-at-a-time perseverance.

It is useful to recall what is at stake. The fundamental reason the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled the entire education system unconstitutional was because the results it was producing for students were inadequate. The basic reality for any system, the Court decided, was results. That is a familiar message to most Americans engaged in business. It is a message that must become familiar to schools as well. The quality of the results is what matters, but business and schools do differ in some fundamental ways. Poorly educated children are not defective widgets and schools are not manufacturers. We cannot discard children. We must improve the education they receive.

For now, we are living in a rare moment, between the hour when a new future is first seen and the moment when it is finally grasped, between the posing of a profound dilemma and the realization of an even greater opportunity. Our overall goals are clear; the real work now lies in making our vision a reality.

We are living between the posing of a profound dilemma and the realization of an even greater opportunity.

Clear-headedness. Clear-headedness means that those committed to school reform in Kentucky must maintain their grasp of the total picture while moving ahead. We are not trying to patch over and do repairs on a fundamentally sound education system; we are building a new one — still. In other words, our task remains systemic reform, which means that changes in one corner of the system naturally produce consequences in the others. Those shifting consequences must be maintained in rough balance so that, as the load shifts, the reform cart does not tip over. In the years that lie ahead, we must remember that if we build a system as flawed as its predecessor, it will avail our children nothing. Years of Kentucky's time, money, and energy will have been wasted. Let us make changes, but changes that will make the Kentucky Education Reform Act work better for children.

In the end, clear-headedness also means keeping a tight rein on our expectations. The Kentucky Education Reform Act is not an educational panacea of millennial proportions; it is merely a law, an instrument — no more. The deepest expectation it embodies is to accomplish what all Kentuckians want for their children — a sound education that will prepare them for a productive future.

To expect that is to expect a great deal, but the expectation is tempered by realism. We have, after all, traveled farther down the road of reform than anyone expected. As with the Wright brothers' first plane, there was every reason to expect that something so new would fall to the ground in a heap. But neither fell to earth — the plane because it tapped into laws of physics that in 1903 were barely glimpsed, or the new law in Kentucky because it tapped into and put

together ideas about education that no one had ever attempted all at once. In both cases, however, the arduous process of getting beyond the pioneer stages is what produces ultimate success.

If it is finally to do its work, the reform needs the hands and hearts and minds of all Kentuckians to make it work. As this report points out in several places, the reform agenda has yet to engage enough parents and teachers to make a defining difference between the hope for something better and the assurance that it has arrived. That gap is especially evident in the key areas of school-based decision making, parental support, full confidence in KIRIS, and professional development. Without significant attention to these issues, KERA may succumb to the "This Too, Shall Pass — Reform of the Year" syndrome; the spirit of reform will arrive at a point at which it can be conveniently ignored. That would be tragic.

The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform is clear about its responsibility in preventing that tragedy. We are equally clear about maintaining high — but realistic — expectations and standards about what reform can deliver. We therefore solicit partners and companions on the road that lies yet ahead.

NOTES

NOTES

[1] Decision of the Supreme Court of Kentucky, rendered June 8, 1989, in Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc., 790 S.W.2d 186 (Ky. 1989), on appeal from the Franklin County Circuit Court, (85-CI-1759), p. 7.

[2] Ibid., p. 66. Underline in original.

[3] The original suit was brought in November 1985, and decided by a lower court in 1988. The plaintiff was the Council for Better Education, a coalition of 66 school districts, later joined by other reform-minded groups, including students, in what finally became a class action. The original defendants were the legislative leaders of the two houses of the Kentucky General Assembly, named because they were the elected heads of the only body constitutionally responsible for carrying out the state's educational responsibility.

[4] Birch, David, Louisville Rotary Club, 1988 as quoted by Robert F. Sexton, Louisville Rotary Club, 1995.

[5] Interview, former Kentucky Secretary of Education and Humanities Jack Foster, October 25, 1995.

[6] KERA lacks "experimental" status in another important respect. Since implementation began, reforms have been based on educational initiatives that already have a successful track record elsewhere. The difference is that Kentucky is the only state where so many changes have been tried all together at the same time.

[7] Decision of the Supreme Court of Kentucky, 790 S.W.2d 186 (Ky. 1989), pp. 24-25, 26, 59.

[8] Kentucky Education Reform: The First Five Years, Frankfort: Kentucky Department of Education, 1995, p. 4.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Reports of findings in this summary refer to 1,659 responses received on three different survey instruments: (1) a telephone survey of the general public, parents, teachers, instructional supervisors, and principals; (2) a questionnaire mailed to all Kentucky school superintendents; and (3) a questionnaire mailed to school counselors. See "Summary of Research Related to KERA," Frankfort: Kentucky Institute for Education Research, 1995, p. 15 and passim.

[11] Kentucky Education Reform, p. 27.

[12] Office of Education Accountability 1995 Report, p.28.

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[13] Appalachian Educational Laboratory Policy Brief, The State of Education Accountability, 1995.

[14] Ibid., p. xxii.

[15] Kentucky Education Reform, The First Five Years, pp. 44-45.

[16] Ibid., p. 42.

[17] Ibid. p. 45.

[18] Peter Winograd, interview, October 27, 1995.

[19] G. Williamson McDiarmid, "Realizing New Learning for All Students: A Framework for the Professional Development of Kentucky Teachers," a report prepared by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, Michigan State University, Lexington: Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, 1994, pp. 2-3.

[20] Kentucky Institute for Education Research, "A Review of the Research on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)," p. 84. "Statistically significant" means that the results obtained from the study had a five percent or less chance of being random.

[21] Kentucky Education Reform, p. 36.

[22] Linda F. Hargan, Kentucky Associate Commissioner of Education, as quoted in Deborah L. Cohen, "Educators Anxiously Lay Groundwork for Nongraded Primary Classes," Education Week, June 19, 1991.

[23] Kentucky Education Reform, p. 41.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] All figures in this subsection taken from Kentucky Institute for Education Research, "A Review of the Research on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), p. 193.

[27] Kentucky Education Reform, The First Five Years, p. 41.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Kentucky Institute for Education Research, "A Review of the Research on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)," p. ix.

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